

Herald 871

Chapter 871 Perseus Vs Alexander (Part-6)

"No! Stand and fight!"

"Halt men! Halt!"

"Do not disobey order! Stay and hold the line!"

"We are close to winning! Why are fleeing?"

Despite such shouts from Gnaeus and his surrounding officers, since Alexander's reinforcements never came, his flank finally collapsed.

The oxen and handlers ran away, and the 'naked crossbowmen' saw no reason to stick around and get skewered.

Thus the following events appeared like a dam bursting, the solid formation suddenly crumbling into a liquid pool that spread everywhere, the legionaries pouring out of their orderly state into a state of absolute chaos.

And no matter how hoarsely Gnaeus shouted and pleaded, he was like a lonely rock standing against an entire ocean, for just like the waves hit and part against one, before continuing on their way, the men running away split to either side of the place where Gnaeus was standing, forming a kind of 'V' in the vicinity.

"The battle is lost! Let us retreat when we can! The enemy is getting too close!" And reading the obvious tide of the battle, Jupiter rode up to Gnaeus to hurriedly say this, even pulling the man by the arms to emphasize the urgency.

"... *Tsk*..."

And Gnaeus, clicking his tongue before turning to look one last time around the fleeing masses, with regret filled eyes, finally turned his horse to leave.

"Arghh!... *Splat!*"

When suddenly, like a bolt out of the clear blue sky 'it' hit him.

Something that knocked the breath out of him.

Something that made his eyes bulge.

Something that made him wonder why he was feeling this agonizing pain.

It was a bolt!

A crossbow bolt!

Out of nowhere, a thick crossbow bolt had hit Gnaeus right in the throat, going straight through his nape and coming straight out of the other side- the thorax.

The man was dead even before realized it.

This one shot one kill wonder was performed by a mercenary belonging to the Kaiser mercenaries.

He was an expert archer with almost two decades of experience under him, and the man had by chance been able to pick up a loaded crossbow from one of the dead legionaries, and after seeing how the enemy operated them for hours, knew the basic way to use it.

So steadying himself and taking aim, this expert man looked for the most flamboyantly dressed man on the battlefield, knowing he would definitely be someone of status.

And unfortunately for Gnaeus, that happened to be him.

But even with such skills involved, this almost 100 meter shot was certainly very lucky, especially when considering where it hit- the throat- one of the very few places where the armor was absent.

Instead, if the bolt had just hit Gnaeus in the chest, back, or even his head, it would have most likely failed to even penetrate.

But alas!

Such were the perils of the battlefield.

A stray bolt from anywhere could reap one's life at any time.

And this could be said to be one of Alexander's greatest fears, for many, many kings had died like that.

"Wha....!" As the bloodstained bolt stuck out of Gnaeus's throat, dripping surprisingly little blood, Jupiter, witnessing all this, for a split second found himself unable to even wake up to the fact of what had just happened.

The change was too sudden and too unexpected.

One moment there was a hale, hearty, and healthy man normally conversing with him and about to escape the battlefield, the next moment he was dead, slumping over from his horse and,

Thud, falling to the ground.

"*Neighhhhhh*" As Gnaeus fell, the dull sound caused his horse to jitters, who scared by the attack quickly bolted, leaving his dead owner in the dust.

While this sound too helped Jupiter finally wake up to the realization of what had just happened, and with terrified eyes shouted at the top of his voice- "Gnaeus!"

But as he laid in his eyes on the dead man lying sprawled on the ground, naturally there was no response.

Only a small patch of dark pool of blood underneath his neck seemed to 'move', expanding in size with each passing second.lights

Having been in the battlefield for long enough, Jupiter could tell with just a glance of those hollow, unfocused eyes that the man was not with them any longer.

And seeing this and knowing his master, Jupiter felt his heart sink as he dreaded to think what would Lord Theony do after he learned of his son's demise and even at how Jupiter had failed to Perseusotect him, despite the validity of the accusation.

But such mortifying thought only clouded him for a moment.

Because what was done was.

Jupiter was a veteran of the battlefield and knowing life and death were part and parcel of life here, he decided to take whatever came after on the chin.

So instead, rationalizing the things that needed to be done next, he quickly got down his horse and retrieved Gnaeus's dead body, effortlessly picking up the 80 kilo mass like it was nothing and putting him on the back of the horse, before riding out of the battlefield.

Though not before shooting a hateful look at the mercenaries to try and spot the shooter, an endeavor he of course failed in.

While on the side side of the flanks, although it would have certainly broken Lord Theony's heart to have known that he had lost his favorite son, for the moment, the man was in no such position to be engaged in such sorrow.

For like his counterpart, the left flank was too disintegrating.

And like the son, the father too tried to rally the men and stop the retreat, to no avail.

And the man kept on trying to do it, even as the Crown Prince Philips crept ever closer, despite the warning from his bodyguards.

Until finally, seeing there was no hope, Lord Theony retreated, and both of Alexander's wings collapsed, turning his army into a crippled bird.

And just like how a bird that cannot fly but only hop on the ground was rich pickings for the wolf waiting patiently nearby, Perseus of course capitalized on this great opportunity, letting loose his famed elephants from the left flank

By now the mercenaries there had managed to clear the wagons out of the way and thus these terrifying beasts were free of charge at maddening speed, their collective endangered roars,

Trumpet!, *Trumpet!*, *Trumpet!* striking deep fear into the nearby legionaries, before smashing into Alexander's center's open and vulnerable right flanks.

While from the other side, though not as flamboyant as his father, Philips too followed up on his opportunity by swinging to his left and hitting Alexander from the other side.

Now, credit where credit is due, Alexander's flanks did not immediately collapse like a box of cartons right as Perseus and Philips attacked them.

In fact, they actually appeared to be holding on.

In the right flanks, the elephants' deadly charge was halted by a withering fire of javelins from the legion led by Jamider (Earl) Yuusiq like they had been trained to do, thus preventing a collapse, showing that if Perseus wanted to destroy the flanks, just sending 12 of these beasts would not be enough.

To finish the job, he would have to bring his infantry, which were much slower and frankly exhausted.

After all, no matter their level of training, these men had been fighting for hours, and unlike Alexander's legions got very little rest.

And all while they fought, they were constantly peppered by arrows from the 4,000 crossbowmen, which took quite a toll on them.

The shields of some of the phalangites in the frontlines even looked like porcupines, with many tens of crossbow bolts sticking out of them, while a few had their shield so badly damaged that they had to get new ones, most picking up one from the surrounding dead, showing just how intense the arrow fire was.

But still, despite such losses, these men were professionals and although Perseus's victory was thwarted momentarily, the king knew once these mercenaries entered the battlefield, it would not be long till the flanks broke.

Thus the king patiently waited for the mercenaries to make contact, each second feeling like a year.

While this was going on on Alexander's right flanks. on the left, given the legionaries's greater mobility, Jamider (Earl) Tikba was able to turn some of their units before the 7,000 Thesians led by Philips made contact, thus managing to put up some resistance.

"Do not falter! Stop them!"

"Do not let the enemy stop you when you have come so close!"

Such shouts could be heard by Alexander, energizing the men to resist, as the man witnessed all this from behind.

Alexander was currently feeling very confused as he found himself caught in a kind of decision paralysis, unable to decide where to send his reserves or even how to use them.

Because those 2,000 men were certainly not enough to deal with both the crisis simultaneously.

He could only choose one.

But then, would choosing one even be useful?

After all, even if only one flank broke, the whole center would likely break as Perseus or Philips shattered them one after another like dominos.

As Alexander was in the midst of trying to answer these questions,

"Alexander do not order a retreat! Look! The center is holding despite the attacks to the flanks!" Suddenly Hemicus urged him so in a loud, concerned voice, pointing with his fingers and saying,

"We will be able to destroy the enemy if they can hold on just a bit long!"

"Send the reinforcements into the center and break through!"

Chapter 872 A Self Reflective Analysis

"Send the reinforcements into the center and break through! We will be able to destroy the enemy if the flanks can hold on just a bit long!"

Breaking out of his usual stoicism, Hemicus loudly shouted so to Alexander, his face ruddy and excited.

The man still believed they could win.

"....."

And turning to look at the current state of the battlefield, Alexander could indeed see the two legions in the second echelons putting up quite a fight, not letting Perseus through.

They appeared solid for the time being and if Alexander engaged his 2,000 reserves in the center, there indeed was the possibility that he would be able to break Perseus's middle since it seemed to be on its last legs.

And for a few moments, Alexander did truly consider it- to throw the result in this one last roll of the dice and try to win it once and for all.

But then he stopped!

For thinking like this was not him!

Alexander by his nature was a prudent man, and these types of risky, suicidal play did not suit him.

How many times was it that he had thought the center was about to break and yet the phalangites had held?

What if they held even after the additional 2,000?

After all, what was so different about facing 32,000 men when you were already fighting against 30,000?

And that would be the risk reward equation here?

If Alexander won, he would indeed be able to end this year long campaign right here and now.

However, although that might sound very lucrative, was it truly, absolutely necessary to finish Perseus right now?

What would happen if Perseus were really to win here?

Unless it was by a devastatingly large margin, nothing much really.

At best the man would then be able to negotiate a better peace treaty for himself.

Which although not ideal for Alexander was far better than the alternative of what would happen if he lost.

And by lost, he meant lost his entire or a large part of his army.

Even ignoring Alexander's labor shortages, these 30,000 troops were not simple levies, but due to the time they had been with him and participated in the nearly 10 life and death battles, had managed to pick up quite a bit of experience in their pocket.

Losing them like this in a single gamble would be a terrible loss for Alexander.

Not when the rewards were so comparatively small.

So the prudent man determined using them in a desperate gamble was simply not worth it.

Thus turning to Hemicus, Alexander declared, "No! I cannot gamble my army here. Not when the chances of what you are saying happening are so unlikely."

"The enemy's morale is too high and every time we think he is going to break any second, he doesn't. He stands and fights. That's the only reason they have been able to hold on for so long."

Alexander at this point a bit ruefully shook his head, before continuing with a bit of a self-depreciating smile,

"Our strategy in this battle was not wrong, Any regular army's center should have broken twice by now. It's just that this time they are fighting for their land and king. Their morale is much higher than ours."

It had been a long, long time since Alexander had once again got to witness the effect of the level of 'morale' in an army.

Fighting under the king, these Tibians appeared determined to fight to the very last and had lasted far longer than Alexander had anticipated, while his own weaker wings had crumbled.

It was a contest of willpower and Alexander's forces had lost.

And the current instance perhaps best mirrored the events of the Battle of Badr, which was the first battle the then infantile Muslims had fought against the pagan Arabs.

Outnumbered almost 3 to 1, with around 300 infantry Muslims facing 1,000 pagan Arabs, the Muslims had foregone almost any strategy and chose to meet their opponents in open battle, where they repelled charge after charge for hours, taking the blows head on without budging an inch.lights

This was in much contrast to the Arab customs of the time, where wars were usually low casualty affairs and no sides fought to the last man.

So seeing that all those 300 men were willing to die, the Arab pagan's morale broke, and they fled, taking 140 casualties, while the Muslims only suffered 14 dead.

Thus in that battle, the Muslims had repelled the enemy through sheer grit alone, while it was later said that if pagans could have held on a bit longer, they could have indeed won.

And this was of course not the only type of example where a small force defeated a much larger force through zeal alone.

There was the famous battle of Thermopylae, where King Leonydas's force used the mountain pass and around 7,000 men to hold off Persian King Xerxeys's force of 120,000 to 300,000 for a week.

And there were the famous Swiss mercenaries who rose to fame due to the fact these men fought to the end, which was the main reason they were quite feared.

It was said that when charging, these mercenaries would lower their pikes and charge straight into the enemy without any thought, and would not stop even if the other side lowered their pikes to try and stop them.

Which was not at all like how the pike or phalanx typically fought.

The typical way such opposing units interacted was that they first lowered their pike and advanced, before slowly raising their weapons again as they approached, ultimately stopping a few meters away from each other, where they would start to skirmish-, poking, jabbing, thrusting to break the other side.

This was the norm because if both sides collided with their pikes or spears down, it would have been a bloodbath on either side, with the 3 to 5 meter spears decimating the front rows and turning the men into shashliks.

No ruler would be able to find such a suicidal group to fight for him.

But the Swiss mercenaries would do exactly that, the crazy bastards.

They would be willing to impale their own first few echelons with the enemy's pikes, turning the entire front into shredded paper, just to do the same to the enemy.

Of course, usually, such a thing did not happen.

For though those mercenaries might have been willing to commit this type of mass suicide just to kill their enemies and earn their paycheck, most of the time, their opponents were not.

So when a Swiss mercenary charged, typically the other side ran, because they knew these men would not stop even if they lowered their pikes.

But in the rare case it did, where the other side was also just as well trained, and perhaps not quite right in the head, the mercenaries did indeed follow through on their threat, for their reputation and livelihood would be on the line, and the result would be a massacre of both the enemy and themselves.

All these examples went to show that if an enemy did not break and stood his ground, it was very, very hard to win, even for a transmigration with 3,000 years of advanced knowledge.

After all, the people of 3,000 years ago were not dumb, just less knowledgeable.

And reminding himself of that, Alexander could only chalk up this defeat to the other side having fought better.

Although he was not entirely blameless for their defeat, the result certainly had more to do with Perseus fighting tooth and nail rather than deficiencies in Alexander's planning and execution.

Thus turning to Hemicus, Alexander ordered, "Split the reserves into two and have them ride towards the flanks."

"You take the left and I will go right! They will act as rear guards while I blow the trumpet signaling the retreat."

"....." To this the usual taciturn Hemicus did not say anything in protest.

But he also did not accept the order with a quick military salute.

Instead, he only stood there with a sullen face, saying to himself regarding Alexander, 'If you had not wasted so much time talking endlessly, but charged into the reserves, we could have won already!'

And Alexander seemed to have detected such a thought, as putting a light smile, he turned to look at his bodyguard captain and let him in on some classified information,

" If we retreat, we will be able to fight another here. But if we lose, not only will it invigorate Perseus, it will also make my other enemies around Zanzan have thoughts."

"Camius has already informed me that many rats and cockroaches are scuttling around the various noble houses of Zanzan, trying to rally an army against me."

"My success in Tibias must have surely gotten many feathers riled up. The fact that Amenheraft's right hand man Manuk was here is a clear testament to that."

"No one has acted yet because they are fearful of my army. But if I were to lose it....." Alexander shook his head as he trailed off, not wanting to think of the consequences.

But then quickly picked up his head and ended the segment on a cheerier note,

"Don't feel sad, my friend. In one year we have managed to conquer more lands from Tibias than multiple generations of Adhanian kings had managed to do over a thousand years."

"Hahaha! What is this but only a minor setback?"

Chapter 873 Hemicus's Bold Move

"Hahaha! What is this but only a minor set back?"

It was with such a breezy sentence that Alexander decided to soothe Hemicus's aching heart, presenting the currently, already decided in his mind result, as more of a small inconvenience rather than a decisive defeat, and asking the man that he should not take too much note of it.

"*Nod*" And although it was unknown how much of that Hemicus bought, he at least outwardly appeared to consent.

"Good." That was enough for Alexander, for internally even he was a bit peeved at this loss.

But hiding that slight bitterness, he smiled at the man and then urging his horse forward, started to ride towards his right flanks, leaving Hemicus with the words, "You go too! Quickly!"

With Alexander's command, the cavalry reserves were quickly set into position, forming a solid defensive line ready to act as the rear guard and harass the enemy while the legionaries retreated.

As Hemicus finished his preparation and was waiting for Alexander to blow his trumpet signaling the end of the battle, all of a sudden this experienced mercenary leader noticed it!

An opportunity!

His keen eyes noticed that the 7,000 units led by Crown Prince Philips on his side of the flank, themselves had their flanks open to him!

Best yet, these men had not noticed him!

Thus seeing this a sudden thought shot through Hemicus like lightning.

A very, very bold thought.

"Look! The enemy's wings, its open! Charge! We can charge!" Hemicus loudly said, excitedly pointing his finger at Philips's units, his voice carried by the wind to the men nearby.

Who were at first confused, and then a bit terrified.

Not because he was wrong but because what Hemicus was proposing to do went directly against Alexander's order- attacking the enemy when the institution was to defend.

"Captain! That...." So one of his adjutants even tried to talk some sense to him.

However, allured by the potential of victory, Hemicus did not even wait to listen to the man, and throwing all that Alexander had said out the window, he blew his own trumpet in a very specific way, one that signaled the men to charge.

"With me! Charge!" And even shouting the command himself, the man led the men from the front, lance in hand, lowered and ready, the body bent close to the horse, legs firmly inside the stirrups.

".....Ahhhhh!"

And seeing their leader pulling off such a move, although the surrounding men were at first flabbergasted by it, upon actually seeing the magnificent horse gallop fearlessly across the horizon towards the enemy, after a brief moment of stunned silence, they had little option other than to follow suit and charge.

Thus the 1,000 rear guards that Alexander set on this side of the battlefield, suddenly were no more.

They were now the attacking force.

The reasoning behind such an act could definitely be either praised or criticized, as either seizing the opportunity or as reckless glory hunting, especially since this was not at all like how Hemicus usually acted.

But it seemed that this time, whatever the reason, the man had.

And this was not as strange as one might think.

After all, people were not cardboard cutout caricatures of just one trait.

But composed of a hodgepodge of various, many times conflicting characteristics, which revealed themselves only under specific circumstances.

And this was one of those instances, with Hemicus showing a wildly different facade.

Although he never showed it outwardly, the man was a fiercely competitive individual, especially when it came to winning wars.

Thus the reckless charge, as the man disobeyed Alexander and still wished to win the battle even after all this, putting all his faith in the phrase- 'Fortune favors the bold!'"

Hemicus galloped towards Philips like a freight train, dividing the 1,000 men cavalry into ten 100 men units, arranging them in double lines of 500 men each, thus presenting the 50 riders in the very first echelon the chance to draw first blood.

And it was an attack that the Crown Prince was not even aware was being launched against him, for he did not even have any knowledge of the existence of any enemy reserves.

He thought Alexander had already committed everything to the frontlines.

Thus instead he placed his eyes squarely on the enemy in front of him, as Philips both excitedly and with shaking trepidation shouted phrases such as,

"Just a bit more! Just a bit more and we will have finally won this battle! Just a bit more men."

The man's throat sounded sore by now and he kept on saying that particular phrase, like this was a supplication to the gods.

And this was the similar mindset for many of his officers too, who focused all their attention on the enemy in the front, urging the men to break through as fast as possible, for they too were worried that the center might not hold.

To them, this seemed like a contest between Alexander's flanks and their center, a fight of willpower, a show of strength to show who could hold on the longer.

And understandably everyone on both sides was concerned.

Rumble! Rumble! Rumble!!lights

Thus, consumed by all these thoughts, it was not until Hemicus was literally 50 meters away from making contact that the other side finally detected him, the dust cloud, the roars of the men, the neighing of the horse, and most notably the terrifying thudding sound waking the phalangites to the peril they were imminently facing.

And even then, only the soldiers in the outermost fringes of the formation and the closest to Hemicus were able to detect him, for the battlefield was a very noisy place, and the helmets the soldiers wore restricted all peripheral vision.

But even if the entire formation could have detected Hemicus, by then there was pitifully little they could have done anyway.

Hemicus was literally a few seconds from crashing into them, and

Bang!

Closing the distance in a second in the blink of an eye, the man crashed into the wide open, undefended formation with almost half a ton of mass traveling at 30 km an hour like a cannonball, producing a thundering thud and ear piercing shriek of the dead as he made contact, opening up a gap literally three rows deep in that section.

The force of the impact had been so much that his lance had snapped off at the hilt, lodging itself first into a phalangites's shield which it pierced, then continued onward to skewer the man, following which it pierced the stomach of the man behind him, before sending the duo flying and making them crash into the third row, knocking the trio off their feet.

Such was the fearsome power of a proper heavy cavalry charge.

And following close suit with Hemicus, the rest of the 49 men too made contact, inflicting similar wounds and opening up a gaping hole in the enemy's defenses.

"Wha... where... what was that?"

"Who... how is"

"What's happening?"

And the attack was so sudden that many of the officers, including Philips lost control of their speech momentarily.

'Was there another army nearby? Are we being ambushed?' The extent of the wound was so much so that the Crown Prince even thought this incredulously.

Rumble! Bang!

And even before he could understand what the hell was going on, Hemicus's second wave hit again, expanding on the gap, while the Thesians there panicked.

"The right! We are being attacked on the right!"

"Cavalry! We are being attacked by cavalry!"

"Slings! Get the slingers!"

"Dead! So many dead!"

"Shields up! Turn!"

"Run! It's an ambush!"

All kinds of mismatched shouts could be heard drifting across the battlefield, and even before any of the officers could come up with a counterstrategy,

Rumble! Bang!

The third wave hit.

And that seemed to be the point at which Philips's men started to crumble.

These Thesians were hired-help and not nearly as zealous as the Tibians in the center.

So when things got bad, like how blood escaped the wound, Hemicus's attack caused the men in the near vicinity to start to panic and melt away.

And disrupted by this attack, the frontal offense of the unit too came to an almost abrupt halt, as the phalangites there began to look around curiously to try and find out what the commission was to their right, from where there seemed to be coming loud bursts of screaming.

Trumpet, *Trumpet*, *Trumpet*

But just as Philips's unit was about to collapse, Alexander, unaware of this great success on his other flank, blew the trumpet of retreat just like planned.

In fact, he had blown it a while ago.

It was just that it had taken the other trumpeters some time to pass the message along.

After all, Alexander's one trumpet could not of course cover a battlefield kilometers long.

As for why the man had not chosen to recognize the opportunity that Hemicus had, well, firstly it was because of the mindset.

Unlike Hemicus, Alexander was not still trying to think of a win here but primarily focused on preserving his army.

While the second reason was that unfortunately, Perseus had also placed the 12 elephants on Alexander's right flanks, discouraging Alexander from copying Hemicus.

Any heavy cavalry charge had the potential of turning into a massacre just like last time.

Thus Alexander refrained.

"Do not pay attention to that! Continue the attack!"

But if you thought Hemicus was going to stop the stop just because he heard the bell, then you were sorely mistaken!

Chapter 874 The Retreat From Lilybee

Hemicus's sudden cavalry charge and the destruction it wrought once again paid homage to the immense danger heavy cavalry carried if it was not properly dealt with and allowed to act as they pleased.

Even with just 1,000, the man was able to cripple a force 7 times his size.

It just went on to show that there was indeed a reason why European cavalry, like the famed covered in plate armor French knights on horseback, was one of the most if not the most deadly thing on a medieval battlefield.

Thus it was very conceivable to know that by Hemicus's fourth cavalry charge, Philips's units on the flanks had been decimated, with blood, bodies, and corpses strewn all about, while Hemicus did not even have a single dead, just one wounded on the arm.

And facing such dire odds, that wing was no longer able to take the full brunt of the attack and they finally broke.

"Escape!"

"It's too much."

"We can't hold on!"

"Run for your life!"

Such shouts started to first emanate in small corners of the formation, before spreading like wildfire across all the ranks, until the Thesian contingent of Perseus's army was no more, as it fled, scattering into the winds like a pile of loose sands.

And among these escapees was included the Crown Prince- Philips too!

The man had tried for a few desperate moments to hold the line, but no one was in their right mind to listen to this 'foreigner'.

After all, to the Thesians, he was no prince of theirs.

In fact, given the political philosophy of the Thesians, they actually disliked titles such as prince.

So with his formation crumbling, Philips's bodyguards quickly urged him to escape while he still had the chance, and taking one last look at Hemicus's thundering attacks and hearing the fearful rumble of the hooves of the horses kicking against the ground, the prince prudently heeded the advice of these experienced men.

It was also fortunate that the man was right in the middle of his formation so Hemicus could not get to him in time, thus having to let the big fish escape.

But at least this captain of the bodyguards could claim to have accomplished what he had been commanded to do- not let the enemy pursue the retreating units.

Because with the enemy's right wing having been clipped, and the phalangites too tired to give chase, the retreat of the legionaries on at least this side of the battlefield was guaranteed to be smooth.

Furthermore, on a more personal note, Hemicus could also take solace in the fact that he had managed to badly maul a certain section of the enemy army and make them draw some blood.

In fact, seeing all the fleeing soldiers, all juicy targets in his eyes, the man even contemplated giving chase and inflicting the finishing killing blows, truly raking up the casualties and making the enemy suffer.

'Perhaps after the legionaries have safely retreated,' However the man eventually restrained himself.

For he was aware that although Alexander might not object to his prior little 'excursion' as if obtained results, if Hemicus were to go glory hunting at this crucial moment, then, no matter what the results were, or how great the rewards he was able to obtain, Alexander would surely severely reprimand him.

So Hemicus, with a tinge of bitterness in his heart, decided to those men escape, his eyes looking longingly at all those delicious prey.

Until suddenly he had another thought!

Just like last time!

Hemicus felt he did not need all 1,000 men to guard the retreating legionaries, notably since the enemy's attacking potential had been greatly diminished.

So turning to his second hand man, he tasked him with taking 300 men to chase the stragglers down, while he stayed behind and carried out Alexander's directives, thus achieving the best of both worlds.

And things truly did develop just like that, the legionaries retreating to their camp in good formation and with very little harassment.

While it was quite splendid on this side of the battlefield, for Alexander, on his own side, things were a bit more difficult.lights

The retreating signal of the trumpet had first echoed in that part of the battlefield, and like Hemicus's side, the legionaries also started to retreat in good order all things considered, but to help the men maintain this order, Alexander's rear guard had to put in some effort unlike their counterpart.

Primarily, the 1,000 men found themselves riding their horses expertly back and forth, whirling around the battlefield and letting out arrows from the 'Instant bows' they carried, unleashing large volleys in rapid succession to compensate for their lack of experience and accuracy.

Here, the rear guards' main target was actually not any infantry trying to catch the tail of the retreating legionaries, as those formations were too bulky and the men too tired to accomplish that effectively.

But instead, it was the 12 elephants.

These behemoths, armored with thick leather hide, and having many swords tied to their trunks had repeatedly tried to charge Alexander, but the rear guard always made sure to keep at least 100 meters gap from these beasts, only willing to engage them in long range and swiftly retreating if the beasts tried to charge.

They were also aided in this endeavor by the fact that for many of the horses in that unit, this was the third time they were seeing these lumbering, four legged giants.

So by now, these animals had gotten sort of used to their presence.

Although not completely immune to the smell and size of these Indian elephants, the steeds were at least not quite as jittery and hard to control as before.

So the mahouts controlling the elephants, seemingly unable to confront Alexander in a head to head battle, had little option other than to shoot arrows and throw javelins to try and inflict some damage.

But having just 12 elephants, and tasked with facing 1,000 men, these sporadic attacks were really inadequate, almost akin to a mosquito bite.

While Alexander too did minimum damage to the elephants since they were heavily armored and Alexander's long ranged shots lacked enough strength to penetrate them.

As a last ditch effort, Perseus had urged the mercenaries to try and do something about these, these men had already suffered and were unwilling to break out of their formation and risk taking casualties.

So they restricted their attack to only the periphery of Alexander's flanks, launching one or two opportunistic attacks and reaping a few unlucky lives.

In this way, once the legionaries managed to retreat about two kilometers, Alexander and his company too then broke contact and started to fall back, leaving their dead and wounded behind.

And Perseus could only watch them leave with regretful eyes.

Alexander would return to his camp later than most of the soldiers, the wooden barricaded structure being almost five kilometers away from the battlefield, situated alongside a pristine lake.

And upon entering, he would immediately issue the order,

"Get the wounded treated. Tally the dead. And start serving meals for the soldiers."

The battle had been a hard, brutal slog, with the entirety of the fighting having lasted about six hours, from around mid morning to late afternoon, so all the soldiers were undoubtedly tired.

Thus the following night the men would have little energy to cause any commotion, causing an unusual stillness to descent upon the camp, as the only sounds that came were the snores of the men, the pained groans of the wounded as they were treated in the infirmary, and the officers reflected on the happenings of the past few hours to try and figure out where they went wrong.

This was especially true for the top brass, like Alexander, who found the quietness of the camp like a quagmire where his thoughts could descent into, as the man paced back and forth for hours trying to determine why they lost, what he could have done differently and what the current results meant for him.

And it was only very late into the night that the man would finally let his tired body know the comfort of rest.

Over the next few days, Alexander would still camp where he was, spending most of his time listening to combat casualty reports, enemy troop movement and if they were marching towards him, and most important of all, the post battlefield analysis.

And regarding that, the group would come to all the similar conclusions that Alexander already had made on the battlefield, such as the mistakes of making the wings entirely out of Tibians, not properly armoring the oxen, and that the enemy's morale in that fight was too high.

Regarding that oxen strategy, it was also determined that the use of ox pulled wagons as barricades from behind which crossbowmen could safely shoot as being an unviable tactic.

The military officers would claim the oxen and their handlers were too squishy to be able to be reliably protected in the heat of the battle, and thus the future of having a mobile line of safe barricades that could aid the archers any time anywhere had to be scrapped.

Alexander was certainly deflated by that news as it had seemed like a very good idea in his head.

But like how there were many things that sounded good on paper but were found to be unviable in real life. this was one other example.

But hey! If you try new things, some things work, some don't.

Chapter 875 Perseus's Aftermath

While Alexander drowning in self reflection and worrying himself over the potential repercussions of the result of this battle, you would think Perseus would be out and about celebrating this great win.

By now the city of Lilybee should have been buzzing with noises of loud celebrations and grand feasts, with good food and great wine flowing as the men cheered their hard won victory and toasted to the beginning of the grand reconquest of their country from the hands of the evil conqueror- Alexander.

But contrary to such an expectation, the city of Lilybee was actually unusually quiet, with little color in the air.

Instead, it was like a mist of melancholy had clouded over it.

For Perseus was in a gloomy mood despite the win.

It had been too costly.

This 'victory' was nothing like the grand win that was required for the king to make a comeback, instead the hard fought slogging match had sapped more and more of his strength, leaving him actually weaker than he faced against Alexander.

And the after- battle analysis and the tally of the dead would really show that.

Over the past few days, Perseus's men, as the victors, combed through the battlefield, performing the various tasks that were required after each battle.

This included retrieving all the fallen weapons and armor, rescuing the friendly wounded, capturing or if the wound was too dire, mercy- killing the enemy wounded, and last of all, tallying and burying the dead from both sides.

And once this was all done, the men quickly put forward their findings to their king, first commenting on Alexander's losses, which they claimed to be at around 10,000 dead and wounded.

This certainly sounded like a lot if it was true, as it would be 25% of his total force- a grievous blow indeed.

However, although somewhat accurate, which was a remarkable feat itself, the digits looked worse on paper than what they really represented in real life.

For among those reported 10,000 losses, 8,000 were the peasant Tibians, who had fled the battlefield.

Those were all auxiliaries, and although it could not be said that their loss did not hurt Alexander, it was more of a flesh wound than anything grievous.

In some ways, it could even be argued that the loss of those weak links actually helped Alexander strengthen his army.

After that 8,000 loss, came the casualty of oxen handlers, which was 500 dead and wounded.

But these men were not soldiers but slaves and servants.

So in reality, Alexander's actual loss to his own army was around 1,500 dead and wounded, which was of course a much more manageable number.

Whilst on the opposite spectrum, Perseus's loss also almost reached Alexander's, being at around 8,000.

And this was despite him winning!

This was mainly the reason the presenting officer had started with Alexander's numbers, to try and soothe Perseus's mood first, like a child showing his parents the good grades before that one subject he got a C-.

Although it was unknown how effective this tactic was here, as upon reading it, though the king did not lash out, the officer did notice Perseus's eyes visibly dim.

Although not as much as Alexander, to Perseus, who had far fewer resources, these numbers were devastating.

And worse still, these losses were quite impactful as many of these bodies were of trained men.

Perseus had taken the first major chunk of casualty when Talukder (Viscount) Prantik had broken through the center, routing the formation there, and trying to make a breakthrough.

There Perseus had taken around 1,000 dead and wounded, saved from a greater tragedy by the fact that the Talukder (Viscount) could not pursue these fleeing men and kill more due to Mithriditus's reserves blocking them..

Following that came the greatest part of the loss, which was just in the midst of the battle itself.

Perseus took another 3,000 to 3,500 men here, and among these, almost all the men had died!

For such was the intensity of the battle.

This one number could really show just how zealously the Tibian had fought, as just those casualties were to equal 10 percent of his total force.

Typically an army broke and ran once it reached 5 percent casualty.

Armies with poor morale could rout at rates half as that.

While the only armies who could withstand 10 to 15 percent casualty were the ultra zealous ones, usually fanatically religious in nature, like the Arabs during the Early Islamic Golden Age of Expansion, the Knight Templars, or the Spanish Inquisitors.

So for the lowly peasants to have withstood such an assault, really went on to show Perseus's charisma, and one should also never forget Mithriditus's valiant sacrifice.

It would not be wrong to say that the man had single handedly turned the tide of the battle for his king.

For without his charge and subsequent martyrdom, it was very likely Alexander would have won.lights

After that was the last part of Perseus's casualties, which came from the heavy cavalry charge that Hemicus had carried out, followed up by the hounding of the 300 cavalrymen that chased the fleeing enemy and reaped many lives, resulting in the loss of another 3,000 to 4,000 men, with the wounded still making back to the city even as they spoke.

In fact, the losses here could even be said to be 7,000, as devastated by the losses, the surviving Thesian units were urging Perseus to give them their pay and requisition ships, for they wanted to return.

After taking 50% to 60% casualties, these men seemingly had enough.

And it took a lot of cajoling and even a bit of arm twisting on Perseus's part to make them stay, as he gave them various excuses at various times.

No money.

No available ships.

And even straight up saying- 'you cannot go' was among the many reasons given.

But even the king knew forcing such unwilling men to fight in the long term was not an option.

Who knew when they would rebel?

Perhaps in the middle of another battle even.

But the king was now desperate for more bodies.

So he had little option other than to take these drastic measures and gamble that the shared histories of their two lands would be enough to keep the men fighting.

It remained to be seen how prudent of a move that would be.

Aside from being burdened with the pain of suffering such losses on the military side, the man also had to deal with personal tragedies that came about as a result of the battle.

Most obviously, the loss of Mithriditus came as a great blow to Perseus.

The regal man would never forget how the old man's body looked after it was retrieved from the battlefield.

Crushed, mangled, stomped on, and squished by the feet of many thousands of men as the individual units moved back and forth the battlefield, the face barely had any recognizable features left.

Instead, the entire thing looked more like a lump of homogenous meat.

But the wounds across the body were still very telltale, and Perseus counted eleven punctures, placed all over the upper torso of the body in various depths.

While his horse.... well the poor animals had more wood sticking out of it than skin and meat.

And seeing this gruesome sight, although Perseus had seen far worse, he could not help but shed tears.

For the old man was almost like a father figure to the king and even though Mithriditus had won him the battle, Perseus half the time wished he had not.

Sometimes he wished the genteel, elderly man was still with him even if he had to lose the battle.

At one time, the stately king even slightly rebuked himself for not taking Alexander's offer when given the chance.

Perhaps they would have had a happier ending if he had.

And it was a thought reinforced by the fact that two of his five sons too had died in battle, both of them while fighting in the frontlines, one with a stab right to the left lungs, while the other died two days later from a stomach wound, his ending being much more drawn out and painful.

But from this, it could really be seen that it was not only Mithriditus's sacrifice that had held the center together, royal blood too had to be sacrificed.

And it was mainly because of these three great deaths that Perseus forbade any large show of celebrations with the city, instead declaring a week of mourning for the three, as well as all the heroic, dead soldiers.

Following that, a grand funeral was held in the men's honor on the third day after the battle and Perseus then retreated into a gloomy mood.

His mind felt like it was being consumed from all sides due to the pressure and he could not decide on his next move.

Mainly he felt torn on whether he should offer Alexander his peace terms or push his luck and keep fighting on.

And although many of his retainers urged him on the latter, Perseus, showing them the aftermath of their 'victory', would famously say, "One more win like this, and 'We' are undone."

Chapter 876 A Slight Lull

In the following days after the battle, Alexander was in his camp finding himself inundated with a whole lot of work.

First and foremost, he had come to the conclusion that the ox pulled wagon strategy was a bust.

Which did somewhat put a bit of a damper on the man.

He had been quite excited by this idea when he first thought about it, thinking he had found a real life hack.

If it did work as he had intended, he would not have had to use infantry to protect the vulnerable crossbow units, but let the wooden wagon act like the shields, making them impassable for the enemy and freeing up his legionaries for use elsewhere.

But although a sound theory, when that met reality, well, the tactic did not pan out as Alexander had thought in his head.

Welp.

After that, Alexander had to come to an agreement about what to do with Hemicus and that last minute heavy charge the man made against his orders.

Which posed a bit of a dilemma for Alexander, as given on one hand the attack clearly showed its results, with a great many dead, while on the other hand, just because it worked this time did not mean it would work every other time.

It only took one failure to ruin the past ten successes and Alexander did not want his officers to be taking such great risks on their own whims.

But credit to Hemicus, when he was asked by Alexander to explain his reasoning, he presented his case very cleverly, not pointing to the result of his charge because the man had known Alexander long enough, but instead the reason behind it, saying that it was a move designed to 'help the legionaries retreat by preemptively destroying the enemy.'

That was a phrase coming out of Hemicus.

So, impressed by this articulate presentation, although Alexander knew this was more an excuse rather than a reason, he decided to let the man off with a knowing smirk and a simple warning, "If you are going to do something like this in the future, be sure to tell me beforehand. Do not do such things on your own."

Although Alexander was able to overlook Hemicus's little act, one other very important thing that he could not let off so easily was the Tibian nobles breaking and running away during the battle, despite the urging of Lord Theony.

That matter was indeed very grave.

And Alexander did have meetings questioning the nobles about it.

But in those sessions, the men vehemently denied any such 'slanders' of cowardice but instead turned their fingers to deficiencies of the ox pulled wagons and handlers, claiming it was them that ran first.

"With our front screens gone, we then asked for reinforcements from you, my lord. But unfortunately, we have received no such help. Thus as you can see we had no other option other than to retreat lest we be overrun!"

One of the nobles cleverly took credit for Lord Theony's decision, which got a huge rise from the latter, but the man was unable to change the other side's narrative.

And then to further bolster their claim, the interrogated men also pointed to Alexander's other flank to show that that side too had suffered a similar fate, thus justifying their act.

From a purely 'on paper' report, these men did indeed make a strong case for themselves.

It was also because of that that although Alexander knew the nobles here were only making excuses, with multiple accounts from independent sources saying the nobles deserted the field rather than being routed, for the time being, Alexander decided to pretend to buy this rhetoric.

He was still at war and thus wanted to be under more favorable circumstances before picking a fight with his newly conquered nobles, lest rebellions sprout up like mushrooms all over the country.

But that also did not mean Alexander let these men roam scot free all around the camp.

He put many of the suspected nobles, especially the most vocal one under house arrest, or perhaps more appropriately, since they were on a campaign, 'tent arrest'.

But at the same time to maintain peace in the camp, he also promised the loyal troops and bodyguards of those men that their lords were fine and unharmed and that they were only being investigated for incompetence in battle.

Alexander even allowed a select few of the captured relatives to interact with them, to let them verify that what he said was indeed true.lights

After that, Alexander came to the matter regarding Lord Theony, and the loss of his newly appointed heir- Gnaeus.

It was said that when the man had first seen the cold, lifeless body with the bolt still struck through the throat, Lord Theony had not broken down into tears in grief, but instead flew into an uncontrollable rage, even threatening to kill his right hand man Jupiter right then and there for failing to protect his precious son.

In fact, if Menes had not been close by and forcefully stopped this friendly fire using his great strength, Lord Theony might have indeed succeeded and Jupiter could have been no more.

Following that, Lord Theony had for the next two days retreated into his tent with a very dark face, constantly rebuking himself for placing his son in the jaws of danger.

Here, he could not even blame Alexander because it was he who had asked the Pasha to give the boy that task.

'It's all my fault. I should have never asked him to come to the battlefield. He would have been so much better off back home.' Lord Theony found himself pooling in regret.

Letting his son die as his house's steward did not seem like such a bad idea right now, given the alternative was death on the battlefield.

Alexander had gone to offer his personal condolence for the loss, giving the man some time off from many of the duties required of him.

He had not also discussed the matter of succession to him, which would involve reinstating the post to Theony, leaving that eventuality for later.

Aside from these discussions and analysis, Alexander also went to see the wounded and injured, visiting the camp clinic to see how the men were doing and what types of new procedures had the doctors there been able to come up with.

The clinic was composed of a series of very large tents, each dedicated to different stages of medical care as the injured men were laid on makeshift cots, their faces etched with both pain and gratitude for the aid they were receiving.

The atmosphere inside was a juxtaposition of agony and hope, the moans of the wounded being punctuated by the soft-

spoken words of caregivers offering reassurance.

As Alexander entered, his nose was with a sharp stench made of blood, gore, herbal medicine, and soap, with the first thing he saw when he entered were many slaves with mops and buckets of soapy water constantly cleaning the floor.

His arrival caused a multitude of cheers, smiles, and even just grateful looks for the more injured to emanate from the vicinity, and here Alexander spent some time talking to and asking for the well being of the men, bringing great solace to these individuals,

They felt blessed to be able to personally talk to a man as high up the ladder as Alexander, with the more religious type even feeling like they were talking to a blessed of the gods.

Along with the injured of course, Alexander also roamed across the clinic observing and asking the various doctors about the ins and outs of their operation, how well they had been performing, and if there were any shortages of any herbs and medicines.

Alexander even watched a few 'surgeons' work on the more severely injured, although calling them butchers might have been more appropriate given the nature of their work.

Surgery usually consisted of one thing, cutting something off, which was always gruesome.

The procedure usually involved holding the person down with several strong men, putting a gag in his mouth so that he did not accidentally bite his tongue off, and then hacking the part off as fast as possible with a saw as sharp as possible.

To that effect these patients were aided, by whatever small amount, by the fact the medical camp had access to Alexander's high quality steel, and thus were able to make tools such as saws sharper than anything out there, thus reducing the cutting time.

It was not much, but when you are being literally cut apart, every single microsecond helped.

And speaking of tools, Alexander got to see a whole lot of them, some old, but many new.

The most impressive thing that Alxx got to see was the implementation of a new kind of forceps, called Hemostatic Forceps, which were specially designed to literally clamp down on any severed blood vessel and stop the bleeding.

This practice was based on their newly found knowledge of blood vessels, as they discovered that blood flowed through the body in specialized 'tunnels' called blood vessels, and not at all like how it was previously imagined- which was that it flowed like the ebbs and tides of the sea.

Chapter 877 Resumption Of Hostilities

Alexander's visit to the clinic had been quite a fruitful one, as he got to see many of the advances being made there, letting him confirm that the money and resources pouring into that institution were not being wasted.

It also boosted morale among the downed men, many of whom would not be able to return to normal life even if they managed to recover, and Alexander's assurance that they would be well taken care of no matter what pleased them greatly.

And as Alexander left the premises, he could overhear the conversations between the various men, sharing their stories, making the clinic a place not only for physical healing but also a space of solace.

All these activities took around a week, and with his forces rested, reorganized, and ready, Alexander was once again confronted with the decision of what to do next, to attack, lay siege to the city or simply negotiate.

"We should attack again!"

And given Perseus had chosen not to give them chase but lick his wounds and recuperate inside Lilybee, many of his officers urged Alexander to go at it for a second time, taking the act as a kind of weakness on the king's part.

And as Alexander thought about it, he certainly found merit to this.

Furthermore, it was a thought reinforced by the fact that Perseus had sent out peace feelers again, offering Alexander the same conditions as before- half the country, a marriage with one of his daughters, and a yearly indemnity as tribute.

And there were some nobles, mostly of Tibian origins who strongly pleaded with Alexander to take this offer, saying it would help prevent any further blood loss.

While his blue blooded Zanzan nobles, people like Jamider (Earl) Yoosuq, vehemently protested, as they were determined to strangle their long awaited rival to death now that they were finally given the chance.

"Do not let him rest and recuperate. He will certainly attack once he gains his strength back." They had very reasonably claimed.

As for the men closer to Alexander, people like Menes, Heliptos, and others, well, they appeared more neutral, choosing to defer to Alexander's decision.

And thus confronted with the choices, Alexander weighed the pros and cons of his option for two days and two nights.

Until a certain information broke the deadlock.

And the source of that information came from the opposite camp- Perseus's!

One late afternoon, while he was resting his head, Alexander was informed by a herald that there was a man claiming to be from Perseus's camp wanting to speak to him.

Alexander was intrigued by this, thinking to himself, 'Defecting even after winning? Is Perseus's situation that bad? Or is there a personal reason?'

Thus he decided to let the man in,

This messenger, as he entered, Alexander found to be a stout and muscular man, with messy hair and limpid eyes, emanating an aura of slight wariness.

It seemed he was still apprehensive about walking into the center of the enemy's den.

But upon laying his eyes on Alexander, such thoughts appeared to be cast aside, as the man quickly greeted, "Greetings Pasha of Zanzan. It is truly an honor to meet a fellow Thesian all the way out here. I'm Zanatos of Thyrentum."

The man's tone was tinged with a bit of pride upon revealing the man of his city, for was a large regional power, while his words were phrased like finding Alexander was a Thesian was a great surprise.

"Haha, well for me, it is not much surprising to meet a fellow Thesian like you, my friend. I heard Perseus was a great ally of the city states," While Alexander's reply quite readily and explicitly showed his displeasure at the man choosing to side with Perseus and thus interfere in his personal matters.

"....." The messenger's lips twitched awkwardly hearing so.

He had hoped for a more amicable first greeting.

But that did not keep the man for too long, as quickly flashing a jovial smile like nothing had happened, he stepped forward, and revealed in a clear, professional tone,

"My lord, I'm sure you are a very busy man so I will not take much of your time. Permit to explain the reason why I'm here."

"We are part of an allied contingent sent by a collision of city states who responded to the King Perseus's call for aid in defending his lands."

"But after taking great losses in the last two battles, we found ourselves unable to withstand the casualties. Many, many of our brothers, whom we have known for years if not decades have left us."

"None of us are willing to die in this foreign land, anyone."

"Hence we first asked the king to pay our due coin and let us leave."

"But he has refused to do either. Saying he is short of coin and also he does not have enough ships."

At this point, the man shook his head in a bit of disgust as if he was lamenting how a man could work freemen like slaves, before ultimately raising his head again with a bit of icy coldness to it,lights

"It is because of that we turn to you- a fellow Thesian, my lord."

"We are willing to defect to your side during any of the following battles given the signal!"

"In return, all we ask is that you pay our due coin and arrange ships for our departure." Finishing the man then looked at Alexander with hopeful eyes.

"....." While Alexander himself did not immediately say yes or no, but keeping a stoic external facade, he traced his chin as if in deep contemplation.

While inside, he was already doing cartwheels.

This offer the man made to defect was a like pie of the sky for him, a great boon, and something he would have accepted even if the asking price was twice or thrice.

Hence Alexander had already made up his mind the moment he heard it, although he did not immediately accept it for fear of appearing too eager.

"How many are you?" Instead, he produced a pretended reluctant face, as if to say that his own coin was in short supply and if there were too many he might not be able to pay.

"5,000 my lord." But if Alexander thought such a rudimentary technique was going to work then he was sorely mistaken, because these men knew Alexander had taken the country's capital, and reasoned that he surely must have a lot of cash.

Hence they even inflated their own numbers, both to swindle extra money by presenting these extra 'ghost' personnel, but also to appear more important to Alexander.

Hearing that, for the next hour, the two sides would haggle a bit over the total coin to be paid, and finally set on this- Alexander would pay them their 6 months due salary, but would deduct the ship expenses from that.

Furthermore, in exchange, Alexander also wanted the latest news about Perseus's situation.

And from there, Alexander came to know a lot.

The first and most obvious of that was of course Perseus's shortage of gold, as evidenced by his inability to pay these men.

This had already anticipated this, given the king had lost his main source of income, his capital, as well as having his camp looted.

But still, it was nice to see oneself was right.

In addition, Alexander also learned of Perseus's actual losses, his army composition, his overreliance on mercenaries, with the mention of the familiar name Petricuno, and lastly the amount of men available to the king.

All these information proved immensely critical in helping Alexander make up his mind, as putting all these together, he only had to do a simple bit of math to find the most logical answer.

He thought, 'Perseus lost almost 10,000. 5,000 more are ready to defect. That leaves what.... only 20,000 men with him. I have 30,000.'

Thus, with the numbers speaking for themselves, Alexander ultimately rejected Perseus's peace offer, instead once again reiterating his own terms, which were- safety for Perseus and his family, a monthly stipend to them, and a plot of land in Zanzan in exchange for giving up all claims to the throne, i.e.- the whole of Tibias.

However, as the victor of the last battle, this was of course not Perseus, not only for the few nobles still fighting with him, but also to him personally, as if he accepted it, it would have meant Mithriditus and his own two sons had died for nothing.

So he tore up the offer, and two weeks later decided to go on the offensive, taking his army out of the city to launch an assault on Alexander's camp.

But there something unexpected happened.

Alexander did not give fight!

Instead, seeing Perseus approach, Alexander decided to retreat, as he packed up and left for the interior of Tibias, forcing Perseus to follow.

And why did Alexander employ this strategy?

Well, because of the intel that the messenger had given him.

From that Alexander knew that Perseus was running low on gold to pay his mercenaries which consisted of a majority of his army, so if those men got frustrated with a lack of results and left, Perseus would be like a naked man all alone outside in the dead of winter.

Thus Alexander decided to play for time, like Scipio Africanus did with Hannibal.

Chapter 878 Unexpected Developments

Alexander held a small council upon his scouts' report of the king's intention to assault his camp.

And there he declared to his officers, "We will not fight Perseus here. There is no need to. We will bait him to give us chase further into Tibias."

"This will not only put strain on his supply train but also tire him out."

"We can also use the time to raise some reinforcements from friendly cities, such as the garrisons."

And to the officers, all these reasons that Alexander gave sounded quite good.

However, although sound, in reality, these were only rudimentary reasons, as Alexander kept the truly insightful ones restricted to him and his very close internal circle.

Alexander considered much of the intel he had received from the defecting messenger top secret and fearing a leak relegated it to only a few very trusted ears.

And it was these reasons that urged him to not engage Perseus right here and there, instead asking Alexander to run the man out of time.

After all, why fight a costly battle where there always existed the possibility of losing as well as the inevitable loss of Perseus's lives, when you could simply run out the clock?

As per the messenger's reveal none of them had been paid in months, so Alexander reasoned that if he drew out the conflict, surely the mercenaries would get frustrated with their lack of pay or results and rebel.

And since they made up a large part of Perseus's army, even before this could happen, it was likely to make the king desperate.

And when you are desperate, you either make clouded judgments or are forced to make less than optimum plays just to stay in the game, kind of like drinking poison to stave off an unquenchable thirst.

Furthermore, courtesy of the messenger, Alexander was even aware of the acute 'thirst' for gold possessed by the king, and how he had committed the shameful act of sacking one of his own cities just to stave off the ravenous mercenaries, using the blood of his own people to sate it.

It was surely a very scandalous move, and Alexander really hoped Perseus would repeat that.

Because although one such act would not be enough to cause widespread condemnation if Perseus was to turn it into a habitual practice, Alexander knew that surely even his loyal men would turn on him.

After all, many of these cities would be overseen by nobles with their own friends and family as well as their wealth.

Plus there was the fact that given Perseus's levied nature of the army, there was bound to them some men from these various cities that the king might sack right in front of them.

Surely that would get the men riled up.

And if that were to happen, Alexander very much planned to add fuel to the fire, using the Thesians as intermediaries to incite a mutiny among Perseus's ranks.

If possible, Alexander even planned to make his own secret offer to the mercenaries, promising them enough coin to defect.

With the recent conquests, Alexander had quite some spare coin on his hand.

It was due to all these reasons that Alexander decided not to give Perseus what he wanted- another decisive battle, but challenged the king to pursue him if he really wanted to get his country back.

"Hahaha, look Your Majesty! They are running. The enemy is running. This surely a great victory for us!" However, unaware of Alexander's trap, many of Perseus's retainers rejoiced at seeing Alexander's tail, thinking they had managed to make the other side take grievous losses.

To them, the destruction of the two wings proved that.

Thus they were eager to give chase and retrieve as much territory as possible.

And Perseus concurred, being elated to see the results.

He knew that with the win, his men needed to see some tangible results, so pressing on his presumed advantage, Perseus started to doggedly chase Alexander throughout the countryside, eager to catch up, liberating the lands and punishing the invaders.

However, this alacrity lasted only as much as five days, for contrary to his belief that he would be able to catch up soon and force a fight, the enemy appeared to him almost as far as the first day he had started.

Meaning Perseus had not been able to close any of the distance between the two parties despite the forced march he had put his men on.

In fact to the king it appeared as if the other side was happy to let him give them chase, but always making sure to keep a distance of a day or two's march between themselves, not more, not less.

This was a result that very much surprised the man, as he found himself being caught off guard by the enemy's marching pace.

Perseus had hoped to use his better knowledge of the terrain to catch up to Alexander.

But such a result was really to be expected.

After all, Alexander's legionary formation was designed to be a light, nimble army, with much of the baggage train discarded in favor of the soldiers carrying their own equipment.

Thus, with the help of some local guides, the men were able to make quick progress despite traveling through the rough countryside.

Hence after about a week of this, Perseus found himself half hoping for Alexander to stop and give him a fight.

But that of course never happened, as Alexander only kept a fixed distance from Perseus, always baiting him to give chase but never letting himself be caught.

It was like as if they were afraid that the fish might escape if they ran too fast.

And after two weeks of this, the experienced king began to get a bad feeling seeing this.

However, despite his instinct, Perseus knew he had little choice other than to continue.

Hence, he took solace in the fact that he was 'liberating' many of his conquered lands and showing off to his men all the earth that the enemy was forced to discard as he tucked his tail and ran.

While in the case of Alexander, during his chase, the man found himself busy too, every day finding himself having to coordinate with the scouts and the local guides regarding the route they were going to take tomorrow.

This might sound a bit weird, as one would think the way back would be easy given Alexander had already come from there.

But Alexander was of course not retreating in a straight line for the capital.

That would have been too simple and even not be according to plan.

Because his goal was not to return to Parthenigh but to take Perseus on a wild goose chase all around southern Tibias.

Thus the man chose to use a much more circuitous route.

To do this, Alexander would first consult the surrounding local population about the terrain ahead, and then send riders two to three days ahead of the main force to scout out the place.

This was done to verify any false or simply misinformed information and avoid the pitfall of running into any difficult or untraversable terrain which could impede their march and let Perseus catch up.

But such precautions were largely unnecessary here, as southern Tibias was relatively very flat and there were few restricting terrains like marches and bogs scattered around.

Hence, throughout the fortnight, Perseus found himself always being offered the hope of being able to catch up to Alexander with just a little bit more marching.

It was amidst traveling as such that Perseus finally came to a city named Kalimat, situated near a river that was a tributary of a tributary of the mighty River Diannu.

And perched upon a solitary hill several kilometers west of the city, Alexander's scouts quite quickly detected the royal, passing the information along to their camp some fifteen to twenty kilometers away.

Which Alexander received with only a muted nod, as it was only a standard report.

This was not the first time Perseus entered a city for the night during his chase, and Alexander expected nothing to happen, although he did hope the king sacked the city.

On that note, Alexander during the past days of travel had made sure to spread the news of Perseus's shameful deed, sending small warning messages to all the cities he came by of the risk of letting Perseus in.

He had said to the scouting parties, "Go inform the governor of the cities that if Perseus decides to sack the city, they can open the gates and call for help from us."

It was something that Alexander had done only on a whim, not expecting any result as he did not think the surrounding nobles in the vicinity, most of whom were still loyal to Perseus would believe such a thing, even if it was the truth.

And indeed most did not, many even pinning the blame on Alexander, saying that was all his doing and this was only a clever way to whitewash himself.

Hence imagine Alexander's surprise when that very night, he was suddenly woken up by Hemicus, informing Alexander that one of the foraging parties he had sent out was now inside the city, besigning the king in the town's market center, and they were asking for help!

Chapter 879 Papando

As Perseus approached the city of Kalimat, the noble governing the place was overjoyed to be in his king's presence.

"Welcome Your Highness! Welcome to our humble fief." The large, rotund lord with multiple layers of flabs on his face produced a greasy smile as he personally greeted his sovereign at the gates of his city with such words, euphorically shouting with open arms,

"We have always believed that you would be able to drive the invaders back Your Grace, "Hahaha! We have always believed."

Perseus too exchanged some flowery pleasantries with the man, before the portly noble escorted the embodiment of loyalty and his entourage back to his mansion where a large feast was already prepared for them.

And as the large man escorted the king in his own carriage, he even let out a bit of a sigh of relief,

"Your Majesty, we are very lucky that you came when you came. My men have already detected a lot of enemy riders around the vicinity. I think they are preparing to attack the city!"

The man's fleshy man's face trembled at the reveal.

This was another reason why he was so happy to see Perseus, thinking them as being here to protect him.

The king hearing this reveal however had to try hard not to roll his eyes, as he scoffed to himself, 'You overestimate yourself.'

To the city lord, this city might seem like the be all end all of all things, but Perseus knew for someone like Alexander, it was one among numerous settlements that the man might not even know existed.

At least that was the case for Perseus, who did not even know the name of this city of less than 10,000 or the noble residing here and had to ask his retainers to familiarize himself.

So Perseus would be astounded if Alexander chose to attack his unknown, nothing of a place.

However outwardly, he smiled and nodded, stoking the prideful man by boasting about the riches and importance of this place and promising him protection from Alexander no matter what.

"Do not worry! Since I'm here, Alexander will not dare to do anything. Not after the thrashing I gave him." Perseus presented a very confident and strong facade in front of his retainer, hoping to instill trust and confidence in the man.

And from the looks of it, it worked as the other side flashed all his pearly whites.

Now, it had to be noted that the only ones to accompany Perseus to the city lord's large mansion were his retinue of about 30 men plus the royal guards, amounting to around 300 men in total.

As for the rest of the approximately 25,000 men traveling with Perseus, well most of them camped outside the city, as the relatively small metropolis would not have been able to house such a huge number of men even if they had wanted to.

Only some of the higher ranked mercenaries such as Petricuno and the leader of the Kaiser mercenaries were allowed into the city, along with some 3,000 of their men, as Perseus wanted to calm the frustrated men down and let them get some rest and relaxation of their own.

Which of course meant hitting the bars, taverns, and most of all, the brothels.

This the men did the moment they entered the city, as they started their merriments while there was still light, around late afternoon.

And by the time the sun had set three to four hours later, most of them were blind drunk, or with a woman in their hands.

As for the people inside the mansion like Perseus, well it was only around that time they were only starting to commence their feast, after having refreshed themselves.

The king personally found himself sitting in front of a grand table strewn with a huge variety of delicacies, with the most abundant item being meats of various kinds- foxes, badgers, peasants, boars, etc. cooked in various ways, the most iconic one being meat glazed with honey and sugar syrup.

Although seeing that particular item, Perseus half lamented, as he understood that they were contributing to Alexander's economy even when they were at war with each other.

The tragedy.

In addition to the meats, there were also expensive white breads of many kinds, a variety of fresh fishes caught from the nearby river that very day, and a few other local delectable delicacies, such as a porridge type soup made with egg, meat, and cheese.

Such a large feast had been of course possible due to the fact that Perseus had sent riders to the man a few days ago, informing him of his intention to stay there the night.

Hence the grand arrangements.

And although there was nothing Perseus had not seen here before, nor was the scale anything impressive to him personally, still, weary from travel and still mourning the loss of his sons, Perseus found solace in decent food and good company.

'At least tonight will get me a nice, soft bed and some good night's sleep.' Perseus thought anticipatedly, while the 'extra large' city lord personally poured drink for him, a toady smile plastered on his face, as he commented in a slightly rueful voice,lights

"Your Majesty, it is a shame that the Crown Prince could not join us. We would have all immensely enjoyed his company."

"Mnnn... I had to leave Philips in charge of the army outside. You know how unruly these men can be."

To the subtle inquiry, Perseus revealed the reason with a short hum.

"I see. I see." And the reply got a heavy nod of the head from the other party, as he then graciously proposed, "May I then arrange for some of the food and drinks to be delivered to him? I'm sure His Highness would enjoy some of our specialties!"

The city lord continued to butter up Perseus like so, exerting himself to the utmost of his abilities, while at a relatively secluded corner of a room, there resided a pair of eyes who were looking the duo with scorn and disgust, as the owner occasionally took a sip of the wine from a silver goblet to hide his malevolence.

The man standing there was Papando, the city lord's eldest son and heir.

And as evidenced by how he was not invited to sit around the table hosting the king and his retinue by his noble father, it could easily be discerned that the relationship between the two was not harmonious to say the least.

In fact, it was even an open secret among the higher ups in the city that the two men detested each other.

And if Tibian law had not made it so that even a father could not change the fact that the eldest son would become the successor of his estate, Papando might not only be the heir but be six feet under.

As for the reason behind this bad blood, well it was multifold.

But perhaps the latest one was their disagreement over who they should ally with, Alexander or Perseus.

And as it would be guessed, the father was old fashioned and much preferred to serve the king to his last breath.

While the son saw the rising star Alexander for who he was and urged his father to switch allegiance.

He had pointed out that no matter how much Perseus tried, the king was unlikely to be able to turn the tide, further warning his father that the king they served had sacked one of his own cities and that it would be unwise to trust him.

However such an endeavor had only gotten him a very strong slap to the face and multiple curses from his father as the man refused to believe any of that, and punished his son too for listening to such gossip.

Thus for Papando, seeing his father ingratiate himself with the eventual 'loser' of the war incensed him.

But he ultimately comforted himself with the memory from his very afternoon.

"Esteemed conquerors, the king will be staying at our place tonight. We are willing to open the gates sometime after dark to prove our loyalty to Lord Alexander." Papando had covertly ridden out to meet the leader of the 'enemy riders' that the city lord had alluded to Perseus and offered him such a deal of the century.

"Oh? Why would you betray your father and king?" But instead of gladly accepting it, Papando was first and foremost asked this question.

And it was posed by none other Grahtos himself!

For he was the man in charge here.

As for the reason why this powerful man was twenty kilometers behind enemy lines, well he had by chance wanted to go on a ride with his horse as a way to relax and unwind, and decided to accompany the foraging party.

And it seemed lady luck was waiting for him with such an opportunity.

"I cannot follow a king who sacks his own city. However, my father refuses to see it."

"In that aspect, I respect the Pasha of Zanzan much more. He is a great and benevolent ruler who has warned us of the danger."

"So I have decided to follow him, this is the best case for me and my city."

Chapter 880 Misfortune Of Kalimat

The reason why Alexander had a foraging party such a distance behind his main army was mainly due to the fact that although the man provided the men with the basic food rations, i.e.- grain for bread and vegetables, with meat, egg, and fish once a meal once a week, sometimes the soldiers wanted something a bit more variety to their meals.

So they often went out hunting for ingredients, be it various herbs to add to the stew fruits or vegetables, eggs from nearby farms, or even meat, hunted from local wildlife or 'collected' from domestic animals.

With the reason for air quotes in the word collected being there due to the fact that although Alexander made it law that the soldiers should always pay for the food they acquired during such trips, well it was much easier to make the poor peasants 'donate them in the name of their lord' rather than taking out their hard earned gold to pay for them.

A nice shiny armor and a sharp sword tended to do that.

And even though Alexander was aware of such practices, he turned a blind eye to it, for it was too hard to enforce as well as the fact that he was not going to antagonize the men who fought and died for him for some unknown peasants.

Thus the tacit rule was that as long as the men did not harass the local populace too much, Alexander would pretend that all was well.

And Grahtos was covertly here to also make sure that exact rule was followed, that the 5,000 men around the vicinity did not make a hash of the surrounding.

Which then inadvertently led to landing himself upon this great chance.

To Grahtos's inquiry of why he was betraying his kin, Papando had cleverly left out his grudge with his father in fear of appearing unfilial, and only dressed up his intentions as being altruistic, with the city and people in mind, in the process painting Perseus with a negative light and showing himself to be a true believer of the Zanzan lord's propaganda.

And much to the delight of Papando, it worked, as Grahtos with a nod promised to enter the city if the gates were opened.

"Sir I will send a scout letting the lord know."

As Papando quickly rode back to the city, garbed in a full body cloak so as to hide his identity from any prying eyes, one of Grahtos's officers quickly offered this suggestion, wanting to let Alexander in on this critical reveal.

"No. it could be a trap designed by Perseus to get us to come closer." However, contrary to his very trusting facade in front of Papando, once he was gone, Grahtos revealed his internal suspicion and rejected the proposal, fearing it to be a ploy hatched by Perseus to force them into a decisive battle.

After all, over the past few days, the king had revealed signs of such desperation.

Thus, not wanting to let Alexander get caught in this possibility, no matter how small, Grahtos declared, "If the numbers man said is true, we will be able to do it with just the men we have."

"And given the narrow streets of a city, more number might not necessarily be better."

"So we will do it with the hands we have."

This reason sounded good enough to the officers, who thus nodded and waited for dark fall, keeping an anticipating eye on the large wooden western side gate.

As Papando's thoughts returned to the present, feeling giddy about the things soon to come, and seeing his father and the king unaware of the execution he had arranged for them, the man took a large sip of the wine, savoring the taste and humming to himself, 'Enjoy the last few hours of your life, hehe.'

However, things for Papando would not unveil as he had hoped.

And he had the mercenaries to thank for that.

"Bah! Stupid bar wrench! You dare reject this daddy!"

It all started with this loud, boisterous curse in one of the five taverns the city had to offer, as one of the rough mercenaries tried to grab the butt of a working maid but was immediately hit on the hand with the wooden mug she was carrying, thus rejecting him.

"Fuck you you drunken brute! I'm married. Find a whore to suck your smelly dick, motherf***ing swine."

The maid there was not one to back down easily either, snarling at the man with her slightly yellow teeth and glaring down him with naked hostilities.

In her mid twenties, this mother of two had been doing this business long enough to know that any perceived weakness during such harassments would only lead to greater escalations.

Thus the strong admonishment.

But this time the woman had made a mistake in her response.

She had forgotten that these men were not her usual clients- i.e.- timid peasants and drunken geezers who would sometimes let the alcohol get to their head and let their hands slip, but instantly scuttle back to their shell with just one glare from this domineering woman.

In much contrast to those mild mannered, honest hard working men, these mercenaries were hot blooded and fierce.lights

They hated their looked down on and when a woman rejected them, they took it as a challenge.

"*Bang!* What! You filthy...**** *** ... ****" Thus contrary to the usual reaction the woman had expected what came out was a string of curses, each one more explicative than the last, as the man's eyes turned bloodshot.

Given the drunken state of the man, all that was now needed was a spark to set it all off.

And that soon came.

In the form of a taunt.

"Hahaha, look everybody! Hayd is getting chewed up by a bar wrench. Hahaha, pathetic."

It was unknown if the taunting drunk man simply did not like this Hayd, or was just making fun of a friend.

However, that did not matter, as the following chorus of laughter that soon followed afterward was like a shockwave, instantly destroying the fragile self control the mercenary had and

"Ahhh!" With a great roar, he roared and jumped onto the lady, pinning her down.

And then what followed could easily be imagined, as the lady screamed her lungs out while she felt her clothes being torn apart, quickly exposing herself.

"Please! Don't! She didn't mean anything by it. Get off...*bang* *thud*!"

And while seeing this her husband had tried to intervene, bolting out of the counter and trying to push the man on top of his wife away, he found himself too overmatched.

And then quickly lost consciousness as he was brutally struck on the back of his head with a chair by another drunken mercenary.

In fact, this heavy wooden structure hit him with such force that the leg was cracked and bent, and dyed matt red, while the man rolled his eyes inside and instantly fell to the floor, a fountain of blood quickly forming from his wound.

"Nooooo!" And it was unknown if the lady screamed upon seeing her husband like this, or because she felt herself beginning to be violated.

Not that her cry did anything to help her.

If anything it might have made things worse for her, as her cry almost acted as a siren call for the other men, who quickly began to gather upon the wounded prey like a pack of hyenas.

This was not the first time they had done something like this, and these men certainly knew how to share their prize.

And as if to egg these men, one of the men from the back, who was dressed a bit more flamboyantly, showing his greater standing among the group, quickly stood up and shouted at the top of his voice,

"That's right men! This city has nothing! No wine! No whores! No gold! If we want to have something, we need to take it."

"We saved these wenches' lives. It's time they showed some gratitude."

And saying so, as if to lead by example, he grabbed another maid who was nearby and started to violently tear her clothes off too, despite the screaming protest, before throwing the bare girl onto a table and pushing himself in, making the girl produce large tears of unimaginable agony.

And soon the other drunk men followed, grabbing all the women and even children serving nearby and violating them, all of them multiple times in a gangr**efest.

These poor women were taken by multiple men and when their numbers proved utterly inadequate to sate the huge demand posed by so many men, driven by lust and alcohol, these unruly mercenaries began to spill out of the tavern and take their merriments into the nearby houses.

Given it was night, these armed men hit the jackpot, finding the women all nicely tucked in bed right in front of them, so assaulting them proved as easy as taking candy from a baby.

And like how a forest fire starts from a single spark, seeing their comrades looting, sacking, and ra*ping the city, the rest of the drunk mercenaries started doing it too, and thus in that dark night, unforeseen by anyone, the sacking of Kalimat had begun.